# Talking in Tongues: Exploring French and Québécois Identity Through Dialogue in Music

Undergraduate Research Thesis

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Introduction

Words have always intrigued me. There is a sense of power in accurately transcribing strong, roiling emotions or immense and intricate thoughts from swirling colors and shapes in one's mind into coherent sounds that those around us can understand and interpret. There is something even more fascinating in the act of taking those sounds and fastening them to a sheet of paper so that they can be shared long after their source has passed. However, in writing, we often lose the effect of delivery – tone of voice, pronunciation, and accent all lend to the value of oral communication in a manner very difficult to trap in ink.

Music has also long been of interest to me. It was how I learned to study; practicing violin an hour a day for ten or eleven years taught me to focus, to work through plateaus, and to prepare above and beyond for the final performance so that giving my all really could land me among the stars. Beyond that, however, it introduced me to another language, of sorts. A single stroke of the bow or vibration of the finger can imbibe in any note such intensity of emotion that the audience cannot help but share in the musician's joys, pains, amusements, and frustrations.

I began my musical studies learning by ear; it was several years before I was really taught to read notes on a page, and far more before I began to understand the transition from practice to performance. Language is much the same. Most of us learn to speak before we write, and to listen even before we start to speak. The performance aspect, however, comes much more naturally here, because there is one less step, one less vein of communication between the thought and the outside world. With our tongues as our instruments, the tone, pronunciation, and accent of who we are and what we are really thinking and feeling become much more transparent, and in songs we can leverage the power of language and communication to preserve not only the mechanics of our thoughts, but the embellishments as well.

Much as I learned to play the violin, I learned French most efficiently by ear. I had been taking classes for several years before living outside of Paris for three months, where I was regularly forced to sink or swim when interacting with the outside world. My extensive noun and verb library was of no use if I could not access it to form functional sentences, and only through practice and conversations with very patient native speakers did I begin to pick up on the articles and conjugations that I needed to transform an English thought in my brain into a French sentence in my mouth. My oral comprehension level skyrocketed, and the complexity of my phrases climbed steadily. My written grammar back at school did not accurately demonstrate my understanding of the language, because in writing I would overthink the nit-picky details of the language that, out loud, simply slid off my tongue.

At least, that all seemed to be true, until I stayed in Quebec for a summer. What they spoke there was not the French I was used to; it was a different tune entirely. Utter confusion racked my brain in listening to Quebec French because it was like some sort of hybrid of my two languages: French words were pronounced in a somewhat American or Canadian English accent while the odd English word sometimes popped up, pronounced with a French twist. I had arrived on Canadian soil with my mental mold for the French language in tow – a mental mold that studying in Quebec was supposed to help fill. It did quite the opposite; my mold was shattered. Horror morphed into wide-eyed admiration when I realized that Quebecois is not just a spunky French spin-off or a special edition of Canadian culture – it signals a unique identity that just happens to be most distinguishable by its language. This experience was the overture for my research and main theme: exploring the rapport between the so-called French standard and its many variations.

As crucial as orality is to language, it seems strange that the French would work to preserve it by means of a written dictionary. The Académie Française is a group of intellectuals appointed to determine not only what words comprise the French language, but how those words are meant to be used. Their efforts, among others by the French state, are an attempt to unify the nation by standardizing the language. Hardly anyone, however, actually speaks in this way – there are too many outside influences from immigrant languages and regional dialects to be able to enforce this "proper" linguistic standard. Then, there is the francophone world, where the linguistic base is the same as that of mainland France but the accent, slang, and oratory influences vary. Quebec is a particularly interesting case because it has a large francophone population but is not its own country – a painful truth for many of its inhabitants and one that makes the threat of English language domination very real indeed.

I set out to explore how variations of the French language relate to the standard and whether the standard was achieving its goal of preserving the language and the French identity, or if the evolution of these variations were actually more conducive to this end. I approached musicians and their music as a means of demonstrating and investigating the effect of the French standard and its variations on the expression of one's French or Francophone, specifically Quebecois, identity. I had the pleasure and honor of interviewing musicians from France and Quebec in ethnographic field research, an opportunity that proved to be priceless in my findings. While I had intended to analyze the musicians' lyrics for a sense of their use of French variations in the expression of identity, I was able to go straight to the source, to understand the fundamental beliefs and ways of life that power these identities. The lyrics, of course, reflect my findings, but through this dialogue with people involved in the promotion and celebration of their

culture, I found so much more substance than I could have ever imagined in my own, one-dimensional analysis.

This dynamic dialogue showcases once more the value of orality in language, proving more fruitful to my work than the written renditions could have ever been. I got to know some of the real people behind the language, its standard and its variations, and was forced to look at my own identity in both languages, as my original expectation was turned on its head: despite the best efforts and conservative views of the Académie Française, the established French standard encourages rather than suppresses variations and evolution of the language. The standard preserves these deviations, these dialects and regional languages — an accomplishment that contradicts its founding purpose but, in the long run, encourages the survival of the French language and the many identities it serves and supports.

I spoke with two French musicians and three who hail from Quebec in my field research. These individuals include Tatou from Moussu T e Lei Jovents, a group whose music "draws on Marseilles music from the 1930s, a mixture of Provencal songs and Vincent Scotto's operettas and of the newly discovered black music (blues and jazz, and Caribbean and Brazilian music)…Their repertoire reflects the Occitan shoreline between Marseille and La Ciotat: traditional yet modern, local yet universal, nostalgic yet foot tapping. Together, they have sought to create a dialogue between tradition and modernity, local and universal" (Group's Website). Tatou himself was one of the founders of Massilia Sound System, a reggae group linked to Jamaican Sound System that raps in French and Occitan in celebration of their heritage and as ambassadors of their city, Marseille. I also met Mouss Amokrane, a member of Zebda, a band known for its political activism in Toulouse, and other offshoot groups including a duo act with his brother Hakim and the very politically focused Motivé-e-s. His insight into French identity

and language is reflected in the songs he performs, from original compositions with Zebda, renditions of French immigrant ballads and songs of political protest, to his own experience as the son of two Algerian Kabyle immigrant parents.

In Quebec, I was fortunate enough to speak with Pierre Fortin, who co-founded and plays the drums for the band Les Dales Hawerchucks, which is not driven by linguistic or political agenda but is simply a group of Quebecois musicians who have a gift to share with the world. He also, however, plays an array of instruments as a musician for Les Cowboys Fringants, a group well known for its songs charged with the spirit of defiance and rebellion of Quebec. Serge Robert, known by his recording name Mononc' Serge, was also kind enough to speak with me. His work is often described as rough and vulgar, his songs satirical commentary and insight on everything from his fellow Canadians and Quebecois to current events in the world today. Finally, I sat down with Mathieu Farhoud-Dionne, better known as Chafiik, a member of the group Loco Locass, whose rap music is extremely politically charged in favor of Quebec taking a stance to save its language and culture, supporting the separatist movement and generally focusing on fixing issues on a local level before trying to conquer the world.

In this thesis, I have compiled my research on the Académie Française, which I identified as the source of the French standard and therefore the ultimate conflict for those identities which stem from the language but require linguistic alteration and embellishment to accurately express themselves. I have reflected on my conversations with Tatou and Mouss and the relationship of the French standard to variations of the language and the associated French identities in mainland France. Then, I turned to the other side of the ocean to explore and compare the linguistic battle in Quebec. The musicians in Quebec offered perspective not only on how their French differs

from the standard but also on the threats that it faces. English is a particularly strong linguistic and cultural threat, one in which the province's geography plays a large role.

This work was personal by nature; it is difficult to probe into the identity of others without looking within oneself to see where one's own views and affirmations might align with those who share pieces of one's own identity. For myself, these pieces included language, both English and French, immigration, and multiplicity of identity. These reflections, too, are included in my writing, as I quickly found that dialogue, like the one created between myself and each individual of interest, is a key component to understanding the role that language plays in the expression of our identities.

1. The Académie Française and The French Standard

In 1635, Cardinal Richelieu formalized the existence of a body that was already recognized for its work regarding the logistics of the French language. The Académie Française was established with a governing principle to "travailler, avec tout le soin et toute la diligence possible, à donner des règles certaines à notre langue et à la rendre pure, éloquente et capable de traiter les arts et les sciences" ["work, with all the care and all the diligence possible, to establish rules for the language and to make it pure, eloquent, and capable of addressing the arts and the sciences"] (Académie Française). Its tangible output is a dictionary of every word they deem acceptable for use in the French language indicating, in addition to definitions, the proper use of each word in communication. This is the group of people that decides what words constitute the French language, a group that American journalist Steven Greenhouse (1991) illustrated as one that "some would compare with a pack of Doberman pinschers with IQ's of 185 and no leash."

I want to expand upon what Greenhouse set up as a perfect foundation for a villain-esque portrait of the Académie. To do so, it is important to revisit its founding father, Cardinal Richelieu. This is a man who was power hungry and driven. He rose relatively quickly to his high status in the Church and was a valuable advisor, chief minister, to his king, Louis XIII. It was Richelieu who planted and tended the seed for the centralization of the French state, taking power away from nobles and consolidating it within the royal court. In so doing, he strengthened not only the nation and its sense of unity, but his own reputation as a man with little regard for the damage his work was doing. I visited the town of Richelieu, just outside of Tours, France, and walked along the streets he built and ruled. These streets are physical evidence of his greed, existing only because the Cardinal bought and destroyed what villages had been in that place, for

his own satisfaction and power, combining them in reconstruction to pave the way for his newly centralized French state.

The Académie was a part of this centralization of the French state, perhaps a reflection of the domineering nature of its founder. The Cardinal served as its "protector," a role that is now fulfilled by the French head of state. In formally establishing this learned society, the Cardinal took the unification of his nation to the next level – no longer driving centralization solely by ownership of power and land but encouraging the use of a common, regulated language. With the publication of the first dictionary came the officiation of the marriage of old French spelling, based on the etymology of a word, and spelling based on pronunciation. The idea behind this work was to set French on track to become the modern Latin – a language universally understood and respected. Dictating which words were worthy to be a part of the language was only the beginning of the Académie's quest to standardize French. It has since evolved into a jury for literature, taking it upon itself to recognize works that properly and extraordinarily illustrate the use of the language.

Where did this language originate? Where in its history did this need for standardization and regulation surface? French as we know it today, from langue d'oïl, can be traced back to the 10th century, though it had very little traction and was spoken only by a very small population of people in Northern France, primarily by those in the upper class. In fact, it was just one of 600 or 700 languages spoken in France, where Latin was actually the dominant common tongue; the language of power, of scholars and academics, and the Church (Site for Language Management in Canada).

Written French – of the variant closest to that with which we are familiar with today – makes its first appearance in the 12th century and begins to replace Latin in official documents in

the 13th and 14th centuries. King Louis IX (1226-1270) began the unification of France in terms of language, assuring, by the end of his reign, the dominance of French over other langues d'oïl through several royal military victories. It had even begun to infiltrate southern cities, those hosting langues d'oc. This was when the language we are familiar with today as "French" began to be called by that name. In 1510, King Louis XII decreed that all civil inquiries and procedures should be conducted in "the common language of the country" – French, as opposed to Latin – so that the people could actually understand the proceedings.

The Ordinance of Villers-Cotterêts was signed in 1539, making French the official language of the state. While this is portrayed as an act of defiance against Latin, it ignores the fact that French was usurping the langue d'oïl in the north, increasing tension with the langue d'oc in the south where Occitan was the language of the elite. As the linguistic battle unfolded, Occitan, Basque, Corsican, Alsatian, and other regional languages in France came to be looked down upon by those in power aiming to enforce the use of a common language, deeming French the language of France. This vision of linguistic unity was what presided the "l'assimilation forcé de la Bretagne, de l'Occitanie, du Pays basque…aux aventures coloniales, du moins dans leur aspect linguistique." ["forced assimilation of Breton, Occitania, Basque Country, colonial adventures, at least from the linguistic aspect"] (Calvet 78).

When the revolution period began, it was driven by a very nationalistic sentiment that found roots in the language issue. The middle class, who had until that time been concerned that teaching French in schools might take away from their social status, rose up to fight against linguistic fragmentation, seeing it as a threat to the spread of their ideas. This prompted a declaration of a war against dialects, fired by the belief that the official language of the state should be a form of equality, that "the state had to equip the 'united and indivisible Republic'

with a national language and raise the people up through education and knowledge of French" (Site for Language Management in Canada). There was opposition, of course; a fear that giving the power of a common language to all people would leave no one to do trade work or hard labor. If the lower class could read and write, the lower class would not exist anymore, some argued, as if all people would be too equal and unified in that scenario. After the revolution, however, two resounding sentiments on language in France remained: "parler français c'est être patriote; le dialecte est un agent de désunion" ["to speak French is to be patriotic; the dialect is an agent of disunion"] (Calvet 78). These ideas generated a negative perspective where dialects were concerned, and regional languages became referred to as "patois."

Patois is a traditionally pejorative term assigned to regional French languages and it carries a heavy negative connotation, largely due to the middle class' declaration of war against it. The distinction between a dialect and a patois is something we do not make in English. I had been treading carefully when inquiring about the word "patois" and the languages it is used to describe because of its negative nature but was surprised, when speaking with Tatou of Moussu T e lei Jovents, to hear it thrown about in a rather casual, neutral manner. He assured me that the negative meaning was a thing of the past. However, according to the Oxford dictionary, a dialect is, "A particular form of a language which is peculiar to a specific region or social group." A translation of the French definition of a dialect, from Larousse, is an "ensemble de parlers qui présentent des particularités communes et dont les traits caractéristiques dominants sont sensibles aux usagers" ["a manner of speech that presents common particularities and makes the dominant character traits of those who speak it noticeable"] whereas patois is defined as a "système linguistique essentiellement oral, utilisé sur une aire réduite et dans une communauté déterminée (généralement rurale), et perçu par ses utilisateurs comme inférieur à la langue

officielle" ["an essentially oral linguistic system used in a concentrated area and in a specific community (generally rural), and perceived by those who speak it as inferior to the official language"].

French continued to conquer regional languages, its advocates arguing that "supprimer le 'patois,' c'est ôter un écran entre les masses et la parole normative des nouveaux maîtres. Non sans naïveté, ceux-ci se disent : quand ils parleront comme nous, ils penseront comme nous and ne bougeront que dans les limites que nous leur fixerons" ["to erase the 'patois' is to remove a screen between the masses and the normative speech of the new masters. Not without naïveté, these people told themselves: when they speak like us, they will think like us and move only within the limits we give them"] (Verny). In the Third Republic, public schooling was established, a revolution Jules Ferry led because he believed "the government must unify France and be…the conservative force that holds together the parts of the social corpus, amid the conflict of passions" (Singer 412). Ferry, like Richelieu, fought in his own way for the centralization of the French state, essentially spear heading internal colonization as the country began its colonial escapades throughout the rest of the world. This system offered a channel through which the linguistic unification of the country could be enforced.

More recently, the Académie itself spoke out against French Parliament's recognition of minority languages in the constitution. A debate in the parliament in 2008 ended in full agreement to designate these as "heritage languages," a big step for one of the last countries in Europe to act to protect regional languages. It is not hard to imagine why: the Académie raised its hackles, "warning that writing regional languages into the constitution would dilute French identity" (Chrisafis), unwittingly confirming the link between the Académie's standard, regional languages, and the French identity – confirming, not erasing.

For years, the work the Académie performed in the chambers of the Institut de France, spread like a magic fog over the land. People were asking for continuity in their language, for a reason to discredit patois, dialects, and foreign languages, creating space for the permeation of French all over the country. This establishment of a linguistic French standard might also be acknowledged as the seed from which the "common" French Identity stems – the French Identity that insists that to be French is to speak proper French and to do French things. The Doberman pinschers rather successfully defended their prized tongue, until the wards of their linguistic prison began to realize that a part of them was missing, a part that could not be expressed in standard French but required the boost of words from entirely different, sometimes forgotten, languages. Our French linguistic overlord did not mind these threats to its empire until advocates for the coexistence of one's French identity and use of many, mixed languages came to the forefront.

2. Patois in Provence

What I did not realize when I dove into this research was this idea that variations of French in France are not always slang or dialects. In many cases, the variations prove to be elements of these unique, distinguishable, regional languages like Occitan that have merged with French in an irrevocable fashion. It is an integral part of the culture of the people who speak this mixed French or "Francitan," destroyed by the emergence of today's French. It is the reverse of the infiltration of English into French – or any other language, for that matter – because Occitan preceded modern-day French. But the effect on the ears of someone who speaks French but is unaware of the history of France's linguistic battle is similar. An "Anglicisme" in French is an accepted term for words borrowed from English to express the same idea in a foreign language. For example, a parking lot in French is called a "parking." In contrast, however, there is no noun to describe a word from Occitan or Arab or Tamazight or any other regional or immigrant language that works its way into everyday French speech. The importance of this language dispute only became clear to me after a conversation with a member of L'Ostau dau Pais Marselhes, an organization that was founded in 2000 in Marseille to promote the Occitan culture there. In a presentation on the work they do there, a man opened with the statement that, "Occitan is not an ethnicity. It's a culture…everyone who lives in Occitania is Occitan."

That struck me, because everyone who lives in Occitania is also French. Yet here, they have this complimentary piece of their identity that comes from language. Occitan was the first literary language in Europe, and it has not evolved as much as standard French. The man with whom I spoke at this organization, for example, can read old Occitan, but old French is beyond him. Occitan spread by way of the mouths and rhymes of troubadours, traveling poets who recited poems and sang songs of love, heroes, and adventure. It was not religious in subject

matter and was primarily communicated orally. Their poetry is considered to be the "standard" of Occitan, but even within the Occitan region, one's version of the language depends on where one learns it. A Gascon, for example, speaks a version more closely related to Basque than to French. This variation within Occitan renders the troubadour standard essentially null, because where you learn Occitan determines what version of Occitan you know. That is to say, there can be no real "standard" because of this geographic variability, but it is important to remember that the variations are all considered the same language.

"Patois is everything which is not French," the speaker told me in broken English. It is an ironic and painful truth. Before the establishment of French as the official language of the nation, only the rich spoke the language, about 5% of the population. The Académie, however, paints a slightly different picture. Theirs is one of a bilingual nation – bilingually French and Latin. French as the language of the people, the language in which everyday business is carried out and in which the classic, masterpiece literature was written. The Académie defines Latin as the other language of France, that of the church and scholars which, in addition to playing a unifying role, bridged the gap between the regional dialects of French. It makes no mention of the regional languages in the document on its website regarding French today aside from briefly acknowledging the historical conflict between the langues d'oïl and d'oc, even after the constitutional amendment in 2008.

The language war in France has been characterized by an evident lack of awareness of where one's identity is rooted. Not geographically: people seem to be extremely grounded in their city, their corner of France. They have their opinions about the rest of France, the big cities like Paris, in particular, but they carry the weight of the geographically-defined element of their French identity with pride. It is the linguistic aspect of their identity that they do not seem to

grasp. Outsiders will visit a region and notice the difference in accent and pronunciation. They will be struck by the strange words, but associate them with regional slang they could not know, being a visitor to that region, or else criticize the speaker's "bad French."

Moussu T e lei Jovents is a blues band from La Ciotat which shares the stories of their home with the world through their hybrid music uniting traditional sounds of Provence with African-American inspired jazz and blues; using not only French but entire verses of Occitan in their lyrics. Tatou, nickname for the lead singer François Ridel, explained this ignorance of "bad French" to me by suggesting that if he heard someone speaking Occitan and addressed him or her, the person would deny it, instead insisting that they speak patois. He gave me an example of this "bad French." Normally, to express past tense in French, one uses an auxiliary verb and the past participle of the desired verb. In French, the verb "être" is conjugated with the auxiliary verb "avoir" to indicate past tense: "j'ai été," for example. In Occitan, however, être is conjugated with itself in the past tense which translates to "je suis été" in French. So when someone who knows Occitan speaks French, this grammatical error is made. The other example Tatou provided was pronunciation of the French word for "why," which is "pourquoi." In Occitan, one says "per qué" which is actually reminiscent of the Spanish word and again makes clear how one could mistake the regional language for a poorly executed rendition of French.

Next he addressed the connotation of the word "patois." I told him I understood it to be a pejorative term, and he corrected me, in a sense, presenting a more neutral application of the word. "Patois, c'est-à-dire un genre de créole, de "chez lui." Ça veut dire qu'il est tellement dévalorisé qu'il ne peut pas comprendre que ce qu'il parle, c'est une vraie langue" ["Patois, that's to say a genre of créole that comes from one's home. This means [patois] is so discredited that the person cannot understand that what he's speaking is a real language"] (Tatou).

Interestingly enough, this train of thought suggests that the pride people take in their geographical identity is, in itself, rooted in the language of that place. But for whatever reason, the intangible language is more difficult to consciously own as a piece of oneself than the name of a city or region.

Maybe it is the negative connotation that was originally associated with the noun, "patois," that makes individuals less conscious of and less willing to get to the bottom of their linguistic disposition. It was an insult, a sign of inferiority. The power of the spoken word was so great that it condemned entire languages and the people who spoke them, oppressed them until they were no more. That is past, now, according to Tatou. He redefined patois as, in writing, a neutral term for a regional language of France, though there remains a misunderstanding that a patois is indeed a language in its own right.

Tatou elaborated on his own experience:

> Moi, je dis 'je parle le patois'…Ça c'est la conscience de parler 'la langue autre,' elle est toute au fond des gens…ça ne passe pas naturellement, ça. Ils ont tellement travaillé par le mépris de leur propre être. Et de la même façon, si tu demandes aux gens ici 'pourquoi vous avez cet accent?' les gens disent 'c'est parce que je suis né ici, parce qu'il y a du soleil, parce que…' personne te dira 'j'ai cet accent parce que c'est l'accent d'une langue étrangère au français (l'occitan)'…comme un Espagnol ou un Anglais qui parlerait français avec l'accent de sa langue. Ton accent, c'est l'accent de ta langue. Tu parles français avec l'accent de ta langue. Sauf que les gens ici, ils font pareil mais ils sont incapables de le dire! Ils savent pas pourquoi…ça veut dire, le mépris est tellement fort que 'c'est pas possible que moi, je parle deux langues, moi, non, c'est pas possible' tu vois? Pour les gens c'est pas possible.

> ["I say, 'I speak patois'…This awareness of speaking 'another language,' is something people know deep down…it does not come naturally…If you ask people here (Marseille), 'Why do you have this accent?' they say 'Oh, because I was born here, because there is sunshine, because… blah blah blah.' No one says, 'I have this accent because it's the accent of a language foreign to French'…It's like a Spaniard or an Englishman who speaks French with the accent of his own language. Your accent is the accent of your language. You speak French with the accent of your language. The people here, they do the same thing but they are incapable of saying so! They don't know why…that's to say the misunderstanding is so strong that the reaction is, 'It's not possible that I speak two languages. Me? No, it's not possible,' you see? For people here it's not possible."]

On the contrary. It is not only possible, it is true. Occitan resurfaces in the French of Provence daily, whether those speaking it notice or not. But what if they did notice? This is where Moussu T e lei Jovents play an important role. Their music leverages the subconscious' recognition of Occitan to keep the language alive. Occitan music has historically been a tool for cultural recognition on the French political scene. In the late 1960s, Occitan artists were writing and performing songs in Occitan, a defiant stance against the French state's push for assimilation and centralization on the country's language front. Because the instruments they used were nothing extraordinary, simple acoustic guitars and drums, the language was the defining part of their music and their weapon in this fight to maintain recognition of their identity. A number of these artists lost their following in 1981 because the socialist party won the French election with a political platform that seemed to boast a victory for the recognition and protection of Occitan language and culture, too (Spanu). Until the 1990s, the artists who were left were playing simple, folksy songs that reminisced on "the good old days."

Moussu T e lei Jovents breaks free of this folk and traditional music classification by looking forward with their art. Their music embraces and praises the place in which they live, the cities of La Ciotat and Marseille, playing to the strength of geography in their audience's self-identification. They sing in an Occitan accent, because Occitan is the language of their home and heritage, as Tatou explained. They incorporate Occitan lyrics, melding French and Occitan together by using both to tell a single story. When asked about the preservation of his language, Tatou told me he did not like that word. It did not please him; "invention" was a better noun, he thought, for the work he does. "Ici, quand tu parles en occitan, c'est par volonté. Il y a plus de gens…voilà, la génération de mes grands-parents, c'est la dernière génération où y avait des locuteurs naturels. Dont c'était la langue maternelle. Maintenant, à part quelques personnes que tu vas rencontrer, tous les gens qui parlent occitan le parle par décision, et parce qu'ils l'ont appris" ["Here, when you speak Occitan, it's willingly…My grandparents' generation was the last generation where you had natural speakers, for whom it was their native language. Now, aside from a few people you meet, all the people who speak Occitan decide to do so, and because they have learned it"] (Tatou). That does not include, of course, the people from the Occitan culture – or France in its entirety, really – who use words from the language unwittingly because they are embedded in their everyday life. Without acknowledgement of its being the real language that it is, however, even everyday use cannot preserve it.

Tatou uses Occitan because it is his language. He does not see the point in fearing its disappearance, because a language, he says, serves a purpose. People do not speak a language out of love for the way it sounds or just to keep it alive; it is a tool for communication. For Tatou, Occitan is a tool to communicate a piece of who he is and where he comes from. This understanding of his own French identity has opened his eyes to the intricacy of the world

around him. “Moi, dès que je me suis intéressé au provençal, partout où j’allais dans le monde, j’ai commencé à regarder s’il n’y a pas des trucs que je ne voyais pas, tu vois? ” [“Since I became interested in Provençal (one form of Occitan), everywhere I go in the world I began to watch for the things that I hadn’t seen before, you see?”] It was his home that inspired this, because he saw the way two languages, two cultures could come together, producing this place and life he loves so dearly in this country that wants to untwine and force out anything that is not what it defines as the collective identity. “C’est la même façon que chez moi, donc ça m’a ouvert, ça. Parce que j’ai compris que partout où j’étais dans le monde c’était beaucoup plus complexe, tu vois, que juste le nom du pays et la peau” [“Because I understood that, everywhere I went in the world was a lot more complex, you see, than just the name of the country and skin color”].

Tatou’s knowledge of two “French” languages allowed for multiplicity in his own French identity. It is his inspiration to use music as a channel to express this identity and the ties he has to his city and his country, a channel he shares locally, with those who share this particular identity, and globally, with those for whom this idea of multiplicity in an identity resonates, particularly on the language front. It is not immediately evident that parts of the lyrical composition of Moussu T e lei Jovents are in Occitan – at least, not to my semi-French tuned ears that were unaware of the existence of patois. Now, although I recognize the difference in sound, the visual effect of the printed language is significantly more demonstrative of the way in which these two languages are linked not only in song but in actual word and sentence structure.

The ownership this group takes of their linguistic potential is key not only to their success but to that of the languages they use and defend in their work. By singing in both French and

Occitan, they provide their audience with context to understand and learn the patois that plays such a large role in who they are, though they might not know it. For example:

| | |
|---|---|
| Ailà, si devina Marsilha, | Là-bas, on devine Marseille, |
| Bessai l'esquina d'un daufin. | Peut-être le dos d'un dauphin. |
| L'aucèu que tòrna d'Argeria | L'oiseau qui revient d'Algérie |
| Crida lei nòvas dau matin. | Crie les nouvelles du matin. |

This excerpt from their song *Sus l'autura* is representative of Tatou's creative Occitan outlet as applied to current events. The song is a tribute to the struggle of refugees, capturing an image of the hardship and hope of the voyage of those who may not speak the language of the country they are bound for in the band's own regional language. Nonetheless, Moussu T e Lei Jovents publishes their lyrics on their website with translations of the Occitan into French. In this way, the language is not only accessible to their audience but it is given meaning by its juxtaposition to the language of their everyday lives. The juxtaposition of the languages, too, particularly side by side as they are above, demonstrates even to non-French speakers the similarity between the two languages, and how it might be easy to mistake the odd Occitan word mixed into a French sentence as "bad French" rather than recognizing its unique linguistic characteristic.

Other songs, like *Par la fenêtre…* actually integrate the two French languages. The verses are written and consequently sung in French, while the refrain – the repeated and arguably most important part of the song – is done in Occitan:

Par la fenêtre de ta chambre
On voit un petit bout de mer,
On voit des grues qui semblent attendre
Leur repas d'acier et de fer.
Le soleil écrase les quais,
Aplatit tout comme un marteau,
Une vieille ancre abandonnée
Cherche en vain l'ombre d'un bateau.

Vas metre ta rauba florida
Per saludar lei bèus jorns,
Segur seràs la mai polida,
Segur ti parlarai d'amor.
Davalarem esta carriera
Que menava au crebadis,
Au temps que la classa obriera
Cresiá encara au paradis.

Again, the translation for the Occitan is provided on the group's website:

Tu mettras ta robe à fleurs
Pour saluer les beaux jours,
C'est sûr, tu seras la plus jolie,
C'est sûr, je te parlerai d'amour.
Nous descendrons cette rue
Qui menait au labeur,
Au temps où la classe ouvrière
Croyait encore au paradis.

The similarities between Occitan and French in writing are almost as striking to me as their differences. It was, as mentioned above, difficult for my ears to understand why they could not understand these words that sounded suspiciously reminiscent of French until I began to dig into this group's work. Visually, Occitan is something of a marriage between French and Spanish, I find. It is quite possible to see the relation of Occitan words to their French counterparts, but translated into Spanish or Catalan, I think the lyrics might look just as familiar.

3. Language Cultivates Multiplicity in Identity

Moussu T e lei Jovents is not the only advocate for the persistence of patois in defining one's French identity. Mouss Amokrane, along with his brother Hakim, has been a member of many music groups including Zebda, Motivé-e-s, and Origines Contrôlées, serving social, cultural, and political purposes from their home in Toulouse. I received a taste of each group's kind of music in a private concert[1] in Toulouse, put on by the Amokrane brothers and the Motivé-e-s musicians. The context and conversation that arose from this experience made the music I had been listening to and analyzing for this research come alive in a way and with a meaning that I had not grasped before.

There are striking similarities in the role language plays in identity for Tatou and Mouss, two self-identified French musicians and very strong advocates for this cause against the Académie, though they might not see it that way. The way by which they came to their conclusions is inherently different. Tatou is influenced by a language that is native to the country of France. Mouss finds pieces of his French identity in languages of foreign places – anywhere from his own Berber heritage to the history of other immigrants to Toulouse in south-west France. However, they each propagate the linguistic truths that not only do you speak in the language of your territory, but you do so with the accent of your territory of origin.

It is important here to differentiate between accent and language, a subtlety reminiscent of the difference between a dialect and a patois. In the discourses of both Mouss and Tatou

[1] This private concert was thanks to a study abroad trip through the Ohio State University, organized and led by Professor Danielle Marx-Scouras who, through her research, has become close friends with the Amokrane brothers. The premise of the trip, "France Beyond Borders," was an exploration of how borders (and lack thereof) affect and redefine French and European identities.

accent is used to describe more local variation in means of communicating, while language addresses variation on a universal scale. Let me elaborate.

Mouss' parents spoke Kabyle and Arabic before they spoke French, learning the latter because living in France and being a part of French daily life required it. Mouss reflected, in our conversation together, on a lesson he learned early on from his parents: that to speak French and to be in the language is very important. Being able to communicate directly with those around you is a critical component of culture and community. He described how this is not necessarily easy amongst neighbors in Toulouse; people in one neighborhood may be entirely incapable of understanding those in another because how they speak is different. Alternatively, even if they can understand the words, the manner of speaking can create a barrier. Someone who speaks and comes from his neighborhood, he described, might scare someone who comes from a middle-class neighborhood because his voice is loud and his words "harsh." It is the same language, just a different accent.

In my conversation with Tatou, this phenomenon of dismissing linguistic variations as the fault of one's accent provoked a tone of incredulity. For him, it demonstrates the ignorance of some individuals who share his linguistic identity and do not even realize it – which could raise the question of whether or not they actually do share it. Either way, Tatou asserts that one's accent is an indication of a deeper level in the composition of one's French identity that one should recognize within oneself. For Mouss it is a critical component of communication that others should recognize. He emphasizes the importance of the oral tradition of any language, and the role his music plays in propagating it.

"Pour moi, les Québécois, ils parlent Québécois. Ils parlent français mais…" ["For me, the Quebecois speak Quebecois. They speak French, but…"] That "but" is where Mouss'

discourse comes full circle, and again intersects with that of Tatou. That "but" was followed by a statement reaffirming the truth that people speak the language of where they are from, the universal as opposed to local linguistic truth. The language of where one is from could be anywhere in the world, even as it pertains to French. The Quebecois speak French, but it is a Quebec French. The Toulousians speak French, but it is a Toulousian French. The difference between Mouss and Tatou here is their interpretation of which comes first, the language or the territory. For Tatou, it is the language, and understandably so: Occitan literally predates French. Frustration ebbs into Tatou's tone when he speaks of how people dismiss their "bad French" as the result of where they live. He agrees that it is because of where they are, but resents that people fail to recognize that it is because of the language of where they live: Occitan in Occitania. The language of Occitania does not simply validate their manner of speech, but it is indicative of who they are and where they come from in a much less physically tangible sense.

For Mouss, territory comes first. His parents were immigrants: French was not their first language and when they did eventually learn it, they learned the French of the place where they settled, the French of Toulouse. This acquisition by necessity demonstrates, in Mouss' opinion, the value of the oral tradition, the value of direct communication as opposed writing. " Quelque chose qui est écrite à une valeur particulière : elle nécessite de l'orthographe, elle nécessite de la grammaire, elle nécessite de l'instruction. Seulement, dans notre société occidentale, la France, les États-Unis, Angleterre, l'Europe, on fait souvent l'erreur de penser que la culture et l'instruction [sont les mêmes choses]" ["Something written has its own worth; it requires spelling, it requires grammar, it requires instruction. Except, in our occidental society – France, the United States, England, Europe – we often make the mistake of thinking that culture and education are the same thing"] (Mouss). He and his fellow musicians believe that it is possible

to be culturally cultivated and not well educated at all. Or vice versa. Therefore, their stance is that "on est le fruit d'un territoire. À un endroit précis, ici, à Toulouse, nous on est le fruit de ce territoire avec nos identités multiples." ["we are the fruit of a territory. In this specific place, here, in Toulouse, we are the fruit of this territory with our multiple identities"].

I want to pause here, because I am not sure that "multiple identities" translated into English is quite as powerful as "nos identités multiples" was for me in French. When, in French, Mouss told me that the territory fuels an individual's multiple identities, I smiled. It was a term that I had been missing in the lexicon of this research, particularly this writing. He explained a concept I had already been exploring but could not put into words, because it seemed like a judgement an outsider should not make:

> En France, on n'a pas l'habitude comme aux Etats-Unis d'aborder les identités multiples. En France c'est 'français, assimilation, être français? C'est comme ça. Alors [pour] vous, être américain, c'est être inventé tous les jours, un peu, ouais? C'est l'histoire d'un nouveau continent. Compare à ici où on te dit des fois 'Oh, c'était mieux au dix-septième siècle,' il y a les gens qui disent ça…" ["In France, unlike the U.S., we are not used to bearing multiple identities. In France, it is 'French' assimilation. To be French? It's like this. But you, to be American, it's to invent yourself every day, in a sense, yeah? It's the story of a new continent. Compare that to here where people sometimes tell you 'Oh, it was better in the seventeenth century.' People say that…"] (Mouss).

Quite frankly, language seems secondary to territory in the discourse of Mouss and his fellow artists. For Tatou and Moussu T e Lei Jovents language comes first. The role of language in the definition and expression of one's identity is not lost to Mouss, however. To him, it is what links our multiple identities. Identity exists because of our ability to see beyond what is on

the surface of our personalities and self-presentation, because "L'identité bouge tout de suite. C'est à dire dès que tu rencontres quelqu'un il est déjà parti ailleurs…la langue, c'est ce qui permet d'être en contact. Avec la même langue, avec le français par exemple, tu peux avoir des gens qui ne se comprennent pas, l'accent, les mots, la façon de mettre l'intensité, l'origine des mots…tout ça. Donc, pour moi, la langue, c'est un moment…Elle est le lien entre tout ça." ["identity is always changing. That's to say, from the moment you meet someone, they have already gone elsewhere…language is what allows us to be in contact. With the same language, with French for example, you can have people who don't understand each other, the accent, the words, the intensity, the origin of the words… all of that. So, for me, language is a moment…It is the link between all of this."] It really is, too. Consider how different you might be now from who you were at the age of 15, or the age of 8, or even at 4 years old. On a larger scale, it is a little easier to understand this fluid identity that Mouss describes. While you might still be yourself at each of these points in time, different experiences and environments contribute to how you express yourself, your identity. The constant, however, is language. Born in an American, English-speaking household, I spoke English at each of these ages, but different levels of formality and variations of slang have come and gone depending on what tools I needed to connect with other individuals from the place in which my identity resided at that time. Likewise, right around the age of 8 I was introduced to French, and pursued it more seriously in my late teens, expanding my language toolbox and altering the manner in which I could link my identity, even that which was developing in my French acquisition, to the identity of others – English and French, alike.

I asked how Mouss' mix of language changes what it means to him to be French. He was adamant in asserting that "Ça change pas l'idée d'être français, pas du tout. Au contraire, c'est-à-

dire ça va re-définir. Ce qui fait l'identité commune, c'est ce qu'on partage. Là on a une identité commune. Après on a toutes nos identités multiples particulières mais c'est ce qu'on partage avec le monde qui fait notre identité commune" ["it does not change the idea of being French, not at all. On the contrary, it redefines that which is our common identity, that which we share. [In language], we have a common identity. Beyond that we all have our own multiple identities but that which we share with the world is what makes our common identity."] French, in my case, was an addition to my own host of identities and another link to that common identity that Mouss describes. And, while I would not have access to this piece of common identity without my grasp of the French language, it has not changed what it means to me to be American-Canadian, and it certainly does not make me French. To the point of this research, that common identity is not dependent on the standard – it cannot be. The French standard is not fixed but a point of departure, a rendezvous where two identities and the languages that link them intersect. "Centralisation? Académie? They're old school!" (Mouss)

So, in their music, Mouss and his brother and the other musicians of the groups they have participated in actively defy this centralizing French force in many ways. They sing original songs, expressing their own thoughts and emotions, particularly regarding the political scene in their corner of the country. They sing songs of French immigrants and protestors, expressing the mentalities and sentiments of their ancestors, passing on the stories of their struggles in the same oral tradition that allowed their ancestors to learn French as their second or third or even fourth language. They sing in a mix of French, Berber, Arabic, Spanish, English, and whatever other combination of languages magnifies the truths in the stories they are telling and the pictures they are painting. For example, *Oualalaradime* is a Zebda song performed for us at the private

concert in Toulouse. The title itself comes from Arabic and, according to an online Berber language forum, is an idiom similar to “I swear to God” in English.

A 10 ans, j’étais dur à cuire
Je voulais passer mon permis de conduire
A l’instructeur de l’auto-école
J’ai dit « signes, je veux une bagnole »
Tu me crois, tu vaux pas un centime
Je le jure, oualalaradime
Je le jure, oualalaradime

The song’s versus are tall tales from the singer’s childhood, the one above relating his determination to get his driver’s license at the age of 10. Each verse ends with the repeated phrase, “Je le jure, oualalaradime,” the singer swearing that the stories he’s telling are true.

4. The Other Side of the Atlantic

It is almost comical to me to read about the branching evolution of today's standard, Parisian French and the French spoken in Quebec. The latter is an apple that really does not fall far from its tree – both variations stem from archaic French, and it just so happens that Quebec French landed closer to its roots than the Académie standard. The question of a standard or norm for Quebec French does not seem to have come to light until after the English Conquest around 1760 – it was an essentially reactionary movement, driven by a stubborn desire to protect an entire people's way of life. Here again we see the importance of language to identity: it is the French language behind which the Quebecois rally, a defense that takes shape from the inside out. That is to say, it was the truly common language, used in everyday life by people with little to no education that became the foundation for a standard Quebec French. The elites and intellectuals were not too pleased by this, to be sure, but they were outnumbered and their suggestions to align the Quebec standard more closely and systematically to that of France fell on unwilling ears, not to mention that it failed to adequately adapt to the realities of this new world, realities that the French language of France had never had to address.

Neologisms, more commonly recognized as quebecisms in Canada, appeared in Quebec before the conquest because they were necessary to address aspects of life in New France that simply were not a reality in France. These purposeful deviations from the standard serve to distinguish the Quebecois from the French, despite the fact that in the beginning their language was one and the same. In fact, the French spoken in New France from its settlement to the English Conquest was, according to Croft, "une langue française qui n'avait rien à envier à celle de France, voire de Paris" ["every bit as good as that of France, even that of Paris."] (77) Research has proven that many phonetic tendencies now considered unique to Quebec French

actually date back to the French regime and are very faithful to archaic French. The irony is that before 1760, while French exchanges on the soil of France were still dominated by patois, the language at play in New France was a very "pure and proper" French. Both the Académie standard and the Quebec variation of the language had their own obstacles to overcome in the process of evolving from what they were then to what they are now, but it is rather striking how similar each is in theory and practice – like siblings who are much alike in many ways but hate to be compared. Those who speak each respective language argue that their French is nothing like the other's; it is the same, just different. It is a nonsensical argument, because if both Quebec French and the "Francitan" mix of French and Occitan spoken in Marseille could be captured in writing the way they are spoken on a day to day basis in casual conversation, their respective degrees removed from standard French would be comparable.

There were several attempts in Quebec to compose a dictionary for the language, similar to that of the Académie's in France. An author by the name of Léandre Bergeron published one in 1980 that illustrated not only popular traits of Quebec French, but was decorated with his own commentary in defense of this "Quebec French Norm" and its very distinct differentiation from any other French language. Quebecois linguists were not too thrilled by this edition, as it is clear that Quebec French is, indeed, very similar to other variations of the French language – and is, at its core, French. Yet this dictionary did well on bookstore shelves. Perhaps people felt a connection to this book that defended their language as its own entity, not the younger sibling of another nor a quirky spinoff of some proper European version. I say this because a few years later, the *Dictionary of French Plus* came out, but was not well received by the general public because although it did include quebecisms within its pages, it treated them as any other word in the French language. The Quebecois wished to see some sort of extraordinary identification of

the words that were unique to them and their culture's character. However, despite the displeasure of the public, the benefit of the composition of any sort of dictionary with the incorporation of the Quebec neologisms was that they made their way into universities and higher, learned circles. Their use became integral to the academic and leadership endeavors of the Quebecois people, validating the words' existence and their service to the cultural identity of that place. This validation, along with the establishment of French as the official language of the province of Quebec, led to a rise in the general level of education of the people as well as increased confidence in sectors like finance, business, and politics. The validation of their language was a validation of their worth as something other than a tradesman or physical laborer. Through language, the Quebecois were able to take hold of the course of their lives as a community and culture.

Interestingly enough, there is a sort of separation into tiers of French in Quebec. "Il est facile de se rendre compte que le lexique usuel a été profondément influencé par l'usage de France (notamment dans les terminologies courantes) et que les prononciations traditionnelles, qui peuvent se maintenir dans les familles et dans les milieux moins scolarisés, ont reculé en public devant celles qui sont conformes à la norme de France" ["It's easy to recognize that the usual lexicon [is] profoundly influenced by that of the French usage (notably in current terminology) and that the traditional pronunciations, that prevail in familiar or less educated environments, have declined in public compared to those that conform to the French norm."] (Poirier 132) This is wildly evident in my own research and travels. Maybe it was the image with which I was presented, that of a young American woman studying classic Parisian French, or maybe it was just polite, but there was a distinct difference, for example, in the French that my Gaspesian friends used with me and the French they used among themselves. Quebec French

itself is tricky to comprehend to my American-English trained ears because at times I struggle to distinguish between the English words being pronounced with a French accent and the French words being pronounced with a Canadian accent. But it is French. The French standard, or a sort of International French, is present in Quebec, yet it primarily exists in written form. The root of the Quebecois identity, however, is buried deep in its oral tradition: joual.

Joual has been described by critics as "un dialecte pauvre, incapable d'exprimer plus que sa propre pauvreté" ["a poor dialect, incapable of describing even its own poverty]" (Croft 83). Jean-Marie Salien, in a piece questioning the lack of instruction on Quebec French in American French programs, describes joual as an archaic form of French – an apple that never left the tree, perhaps. Quebecois French evolved to more or less conform to the newer French standard rules and has a more identifiable systematic structure than joual. Quebecois French is comprehensible by all Francophones, whereas only the Quebecois understand joual. The latter has become a defining centerpiece in the Quebecois identity, as Salien describes, because "if anything, the use of joual is ambivalent, because it serves as both a simple medium of communication and as a symbol of cultural identity, therefore, as an instrument that is not primarily linguistic…joual is the rallying force by which the Quebecois affirm their "otherness."" (Salien 98) In the late 60s into the 1970s, as the Quebecois struggled to affirm their cultural identity through language in the face of Canada's overwhelming English majority, there was a surge of joual in literature and the arts, a rather counter-intuitive movement because, historically, joual was the oral tradition of Quebec French. Somehow, however, by establishing concrete forms of this core aspect of the Quebec identity, the Quebecois found the balance between denouncing all ties to both English and French and giving credit where credit was due. There is no doubt that Quebec French is closely linked to the French standard, and that it draws influence from the English language and

North American culture. Both qualities surface in Quebec French, but joual serves as the anchor to which all embellishing aspects of the Quebec identity are tied. In fact, just as Occitan or Arabic words find their way into the everyday French of Frenchmen in France, joual makes a regular appearance in the conversations of the Quebecois.

Though joual is really just another evolution of French, not another language like Occitan or Arabic, the similarity is worth noting because it proves the versatility of the French language and the comfort its speakers have to use it mixed with other distinct cultural entities in order to express their own French or Francophone identity. It illustrates the scaffolding that standard French provides, contrary to the goal of the Academy, to allow for the multiplicity of an individual's identity, rather than confining it to a one-dimensional square of rules to be followed – especially when those rules do not adequately allow for the expression of reality. This rise of joual to the front lines helped the Quebecois come to terms with their version of French, making it more socially acceptable to the point where some journalists, writers, and intellectuals stopped suppressing the Quebec characteristics in their French – though there were also those who did not like joual at all. It was no longer "necessaire d'adopter un accent étranger pour faire savant, et on peut incorporer des québécismes dans une oeuvre de creation littéraire sans avoir à les justifier ni à les munir des laissez-passer conventionnels que représentaient l'italique et le guillemets" ["necessary to adopt a foreign accent to be learned, and one [could] incorporate quebecisms in a work of literature without having to justify them or equip them with italics or quotation marks"] (Poirier 134). Granted, sometimes professionals might cut themselves a little too loose, and take less care than perhaps they should in the formality of the language they use. There must be, therefore, a balance between the purist French argument that Quebec French is,

like Francitan, “bad French,” and the common, nationalistic pride that grows from the unique characteristics of this French variation.

The foundation for this balance lies in the hands of the Office of the French Language (OLF), which, in 1965, produced a list of quebecisms in an effort to make their presence in the language official. One year later, the Linguistic Committee of Radio Canada did the same thing, but the two lists hardly overlapped – only 25 of the 89 words on Radio Canada’s list also appeared on that of the OLF (Poirier 137). This discrepancy, or rather, lack of thoroughness on each list’s part, demonstrates not only the difficulty of joual’s rise and acceptance in society but the standardization of something so natural in practice to a strict, systematic theory. The standard of a language cannot hope to account for all the cultural aspects of those who speak it in its various forms, yet while the sixties exhibited a willingness to explore the fluidity of language as a tool of communication and self-expression, the nineties saw the return of efforts to normalize Quebec French. Note, here, the use of the word “normalize” rather than “standardize” – it is, in my mind, almost comparable to “neutralize.” The desire to be a distinct people with a distinct language, no more associated with France than with English Canada, sparked an extreme in the purist argument to not only have a systematic Quebec French standard but to make it something everyone conformed to: the norm. This seems to have been the Académie’s goal at some point, as well, and while the body itself perhaps still strives for this, its constituents in France and Quebec use it as a reference, a standard to which one can compare but not necessarily conform (Poirier 136).

5. Québec Against the World, Linguistically

The variance in perspective offered by the three musicians I spoke to in Quebec painted a colorful image of the linguistic situation. It highlighted the common issues while illuminating the extreme to which the concerns are raised. Pierre Fortin had a more relaxed perspective: as the drummer for Les Dales Hawerchucks and a jack of all trades musician for Les Cowboys Fringants, he has an almost backstage pass kind of view of the music and is not directly involved in the lyrics. But as music itself is a means of communication and he is immersed in the Quebecois community, he had plenty of insight to offer on the language that ties his music to its fans and he to his friends and family. Serge Robert, who performs under the stage name "Mononc' Serge," spoke from his center, his own recognition of the value of his language not only in his work but in the everyday life of the Quebecois people. His music simultaneously addresses the question of identity in Quebec and issues in the world at large. This active global engagement speaks volumes, whether Serge means it to or not, because his interpretations are expressed in the Quebecois language from the Quebecois cultural perspective. Mathieu Farhoud-Dionne, known by his stage name "Chafiik" as a member of the rap group Loco Locass, makes his music in defense of Quebec and its cultural identity. The group's songs take on enemies of the Quebec state, fight for its separation from the rest of its English-speaking country, and promote the Quebecois culture and language. His perspective was much more politicized and culturally focused than that of the other two, but the fabulous thing about our conversation was that culture always looped back around to language.

French is the anchor of Quebec culture; arguably more so than it is for French culture. While the French state may be battling with the diversity and multiplicity of identities of its people in its quest for centralization, Quebec is struggling to uphold even its common identity,

suffocating as it is in a sea of Anglo-Saxon culture. The difference in the rapport between any sort of standard French for the artists in France and Quebec is stark in some ways. While Tatou and Mouss fight for breathing room under the grip "proper" French has on their people and culture, Pierre, Serge, and Chafiik are defending the irrevocable bond between their way of life and the language in which they live it.

That last phrase may sound strange to English ear. But once again, I have this idea, expressed in French, that perfectly encapsulates a sentiment in a way that does not quite translate into English. At some point in our conversation, Serge Robert said to me, "À l'extérieur du Quebec en fait c'est pas possible de vivre en français," literally stating that, outside of Quebec, it is not possible to live in French. "Live in French;" like the scaffolding I have described as the Académie's standard is really this little world within which France and Quebec exist. The complication is that while my French musicians are angling to open the gates to allow for increased linguistic tolerance and diversity, my Quebec friends are struggling to get them closed against the English tide.

In fact, conversations with these Quebec musicians were seemingly more introspective, existential, almost. Each one demonstrated a similar robust awareness of the role of their language, or any language, in the world of human interaction. It was not just language, either, but the orality of it that they acknowledged as crucial. "Une langue c'est une façon de penser," ["A language is a way of thinking,"] Chafiik told me in our interview. "C'est l'architecture de ta pensée. Si tu ne peux pas le dire tu peux pas le penser...Une langue te fait penser un peu différemment qu'un autre et c'est pour ça qu'il faut qu'il y ait, donc il faut avoir plus de langues sur la planète, plus de cultures. It's a way of thinking, it's an angle on reality. Tu ne veux pas que tout le monde voie la réalité du même côté, tu veux que…if there's a problem you want the most

perspectives to solve this problem" ["It's the architecture of your thoughts. If you can't say it, you can't think it…A language makes you think a little differently than others, so we must have more languages on the planet, more cultures. It's a way of thinking, it's an angle on reality. You don't want the whole world to see reality from the same side. If there's a problem, you want the most perspectives to solve this problem."] This is almost a direct affront to the Académie Française, which not only functions on a primarily written basis but wants to limit language through this written standard. That lends to its role as a scaffold, from which living languages can grow and depart, but not to function as a living structure itself.

Serge approached this idea of language as a tool in a slightly different way. In fact, his perspective is very similar to that of Tatou, who spoke of language having a purpose, not just being a pretty thing to look at. Serge describes language as a material, one that very few people in North America use and within which there is, therefore, a lot of opportunity, particularly when it comes to music. What is interesting here is the precarious nature of this relationship: indeed, the fewer the number of people using a material the more there is to go around. French, however, is not a tangible material, and if too few people are using it, there might not be any to go around in North America. Serge addresses this, as well. He explains how he came to decide to make music in French, starting from a place where the music he liked was, in fact, in English. His first reflex, therefore, was to create music similar to that which he himself enjoys. The issue was that his English was rotten, he was physically incapable of composing in this language to an exceptional degree. French, on the other hand, was not only a language he felt very comfortable working in, it was his language.

To write in French was natural for Serge, not a vendetta against English nor an attempt to save French. His metaphor of language as a material makes sense here, too, because in his genre

of a kind of underground metal music, the competition amongst English-speaking artists is high. There is simply more undiscovered terrain to explore with his French work. Moreover, and what provides counterbalance for this shifty metaphor is that he also wanted to "contribuer à la culture locale…Le fait que la langue ait survécu ici c'est quand même extraordinaire pis j'ai pas envie de tourner de dos à ça, j'ai envie de mordre dedans, de contribuer à ça, j'ai envie de prendre cette langue que vient de l'amener encore plus loin pis que des gens dans les années à venir vont continuer à la parler, à faire vivre avec des chansons, avec des livres, avec la parlante dans les rues tous les jours" ["contribute to the local culture…The fact that the language has survived here is in itself extraordinary. I didn't want to turn my back on that, I wanted to sink my teeth into it, to contribute to it. I wanted to take this language that has come along so far so that people in the years to come will continue to speak it, to give life to it with songs, books, and just speaking it in the streets every day"] (Robert). This is the reinforcement of oral tradition, something that cannot be replicated by the Académie nor any other regulatory group for any language, let alone French. What it does is priceless: language preserves culture. It facilitates the passing on of ideas and tradition, something to which both Serge and Chafiik agreed. "Nous on n'a pas la culture française, on n'a pas non plus la culture américaine. On a emprunté des deux mais ça fait une culture spéciale. Not better, just different. Et la langue est le plus important vecteur de ta culture. C'est la chose la plus importante" ["We don't have the French culture, nor do we have an American culture. We borrow from them both but to make a special culture. Not better, just different. And language is the most important vector of your culture. It is the most important thing"] (Chafiik).

As in in France, geography plays a large role in the hold of French in Quebec. However, whereas in France, it was indicative of the embellishments brought to the common language, in

Quebec it rather equates to the severity of the threat to the existence of the French language there. Montreal seemed to be the center of the problem because of its increasing multiculturalism. According to Serge, this city is the reason for Law 101, the bill declaring French the official language of the Quebec province. People in the rural areas are not exposed to English enough daily for it to pose a real threat towards their life in French, but Montreal is nearly split down the middle, with primarily Anglophones on its west bank and Francophones on the east. In the rural regions, however, like Lac St. Jean or Gaspesie, there is arguably some discontent with this law preserving the French language because they feel it prevents them from learning English. Backwards though that may seem, English is perceived as the international language, but it is not taught to a functional degree in schools. So again, we have this precarious balance of allowing enough contact with English so the Quebecois can survive outside of their French bubble, but not so much as to take away from where they live, in French.

Pierre seconded this idea that the sentiment towards English shifts slightly when one leaves the major Quebecois metropolis. “Moi ça fait 17 ans que je suis à Montréal, j’ai des amis noirs, des amis d’autres cultures, d’autres langues…c’est une habitude. Mais quand je retourne au Lac St Jean, c’est pas une habitude, c’est vraiment québécois, il n’y a personne qui parle autre chose que le québécois, pis moins bien que je parle en ce moment, c’est évidemment plus mélangé, c’est plus exotique.” [“I have lived in Montreal for 17 years. I have African friends, friends from other cultures, other languages…it’s normal. But when I return to Lac St. Jean, it’s not normal. It’s really Quebecois; no one speaks anything but Quebecois there, and it’s worse than how I’m speaking it now, more mixed and exotic”] Pierre told me. It was funny, because my first question to him was whether or not he was purposefully speaking more “cleanly” so that I might understand. He said he was making a distinct effort, because his regional accent was

quite strong. The other important observation he made was just how quickly one could move from the multi-lingual city into the mono-lingual country. Charlevoix, a town just 45 minutes outside of Quebec, was his recommendation for a close, quick example of the drastic separation and isolation that the rural communities of the province face. So how can French really be in danger?

Chafiik assured me that if Montreal lost its French, the entire province was doomed. It is a large concentration of people, people who interact regularly with the rising English tide. He demonstrated, using one hand to represent one group of people and his other hand to represent another, how among "la partie qui habite juste à côté de la frontière, leur langue se mélange avec l'autre et elle perd un peu de leur propre… c'est comme ça, comme on est des bactéries, il y a quelque chose très organique là" ["the parts that live just beside the border, language mixes with the other and each loses a little of their own…it's like that, like a bacteria, there's something very organic there."] The one culture, the stronger one, is destined to eventually absorb the smaller one, and in the case of Quebec, according to Chafiik, absorption by Anglo-Saxon culture is looming.

A lot of what these artists described to me confirmed my prior assumptions. Two things, however, shocked me. The first was the lack of hostility towards English. At one point or another in our conversation, each man expressed his appreciation, even fondness, of the English language. Pierre, for its international nature and connectivity, Serge, for the musicians he loves and the versatility it allows him, in travel and life, and Chafiik for its quick, witty retorts. He went into extensive detail on the difficulty of translating phrases and jokes into French, comically in awe of how it is just not possible to be quite as sharp. The other surprise was a consideration I did not make until I was face to face with Pierre and I made the assumption that

he identified as Quebecois. Something in the way I phrased one of my questions made me pause and ask, “I assume you do identify as Quebecois?” I am quite glad I did. Pierre’s response was a reluctant nod, with the suggestion of Francophone more so than Quebecois. His perspective throughout our conversation looked to the international scale, so I suppose I should not have been surprised when he said Francophone was more identifying for him when it came to music, because his band, Les Dales Hawerchucks, play music for music’s sake, not for any sort of political battle. He marveled at the beauty of the world and its many languages and expressed his love for Montreal because of its multiculturalism, before assuring me he is proud of his French. When I inquired about the difference between Francophone and Quebecois, he attributed it to the European influence on Quebec culture. Serge, on the other hand, when I posed the same question, was speechless for a good fifteen seconds:

> Quelqu’un qui serait au Québec qui ne parlerait pas un mot du français, je dirais bon il est québécois de facto, il a son permis de conduire et ces trucs et tout ça mais l’âme du Québec est liée à la langue française. Alors, pour moi la personnalité spécifique du Québec, comment dire, c’est le cœur de la spécificité québécoise c’est la langue française. C’est sûr qu’il y a des gens qui ne sont pas francophones au Québec, ils sont québécois aussi et tout ça, mais il reste que le cœur, le centre de l’identité québécoise ça reste la langue française. Pour moi les deux sont liés en fait. Si tu vas aller je sais pas en Ontario ou au Manitoba ou au Nouveau Brunswick, les gens vont pas dire ‘Moi je suis Manitobain.’ S’il y a un mouvement identitaire au Québec, un sentiment identitaire au Québec c’est parce il y a la langue française qui est au cœur de ça. Dans les autres provinces ça existe pas, ce truc là. Les gens s’identifient au Canada. Je pense qu’ici au Québec il y a l’identité à la province qui est plus forte que l’identité au Canada. C’est

> parce qu'ici on parle français. ["Someone who could be from Quebec but speaks not a word of French, I would say they are, de facto, Quebecois…Sure there are people who aren't francophone in Quebec, they are Quebecois and all that, but it holds that the heart, the center of the Quebec identity is the French language. For me, the two are linked, in fact. If you go to, I don't know, Ontario or Manitoba or New Brunswick, people aren't going to say, 'Me? I'm Manitoban.' There is an identity movement in Quebec, a sentiment of being Quebecois because of the French language at its heart. In other provinces it doesn't exist, that piece there. People identity with Canada. I think here in Quebec the provincial identity is stronger than the Canadian identity. It's because here we speak French."]

Chafiik was slightly less taken aback by my inquiry, and though he too touched on the Canadian identity that was probably stronger for those who live in other provinces, he was strong in his belief that "être Québécois, ce qui compte, vraiment est habiter au Québec et assumer le fait de dire je suis québécois. C'est aussi simple que ça…A guy from Saskatchewan is probably more proud to be Canadian than Saskatchewanian…I assume la culture saskatchewanaine et manitobaine n'est pas très différente. Tandis avec nous, tu traverses notre frontière, tu vas à Ontario, 'Wow, j'ai même pas besoin d'amener mon passeport mais je suis en voyage.'" ["to be Quebecois what really counts is to live in Quebec and to say, "I am Quebecois." It's as simple as that…A guy from Saskatchewan is probably prouder to be Canadian than Saskatchewanian, and I assume the Saskatchewan culture is not much different from that of Manitoba. Whereas, you cross from Quebec to Ontario and it's like, wow, I didn't use my passport but I'm traveling."] To him, in short, the Quebecois identity belongs to those who take it, willingly. It is a subset of the Francophone world, and those who speak French and are Quebecois are, by default,

francophone. His definition, however, allows for others to be a part of the culture if they so choose…at which point, it is difficult to avoid being francophone because French is the heart of this culture.

One of the songs I had the chance to discuss with Chafiik in our conversation was *Le But*, one that is on the surface a hockey anthem, but upon closer inspection digs much deeper into not only Quebecois culture but its pride in this sport which is Quebecois at its core. "Le Canada, c'était à Québec. Donc le pays qu'on appelle maintenant Canada a volé, emprunté le nom qu'on avait donné, et notre symbole, et notre hymne – O Canada, c'est un hymne 100% francophone pour les Québécois. Donc quand ils ont crée le club d'hockey canadien c'est un club pour les francophones, pour des joies francophones et un public francophone sur des bases culturelles" ["Canada was Québec. So the country that we now call Canada stole or borrowed the name that we [the Quebecois] had been given, and our symbol, and our anthem – O Canada? Its an anthem 100% francophone for the Quebecois. So when the Canadian hockey club was created, it was a club for the Francophones, for the enjoyment of the Francophones and for the public of Francophones with a foundation in their culture"] (Chafiik). It is a battle cry for the Montreal Canadians, the province's hockey team, but beyond that that it is a rallying cry for the Quebecois themselves.

Icitte au Québec y fait pas froid, y fait frette
C'est de même parce que c'est de même pis c'est ben correct
On a de la place en masse
Et nos face-à-face on les fait sur la glace
Alors, on lace nos patins pis nos casques
Et comme Maurice, on glisse dans l'arène avec la haine de la défaite
Et le feu dans les yeux
En fait, Quand on veut, on peut...
Gagner!

The first line acts as a little slap on the wrist to "proper" French; "froid" is the French word for cold. "Frette" is how a true Quebecois would say it. Even the next line uses a classic quebecism, "c'est ben correct," a widely used Anglicism in Quebec to affirm that something is good or okay. Beneath even this quebecisms, the song praises this sport that brought the Quebecois to their feet and inspired their defense of their language and culture. Maurice Richard, the hockey great of the 40s and 50s, was the first Quebecois to be the best at anything, Chafiik told me. His success became a platform for the Quebecois people to fight for their rights as a minority group in Canada. *Le But* contextualizes all of this, defining the Quebecois spirit and explaining why hockey is Quebec's national sport. Yes, national. Because despite its status as a province of Canada, there is a very nationalistic sentiment in Quebec, fueled primarily by the people's strong linguistic identity.

Serge has an entire album, "Mon Voyage au Canada," of satirical songs regarding not just the Quebec identity, but that of each province in Canada. Ironically, an important song about Quebec pokes very serious fun at the history of the referendums in which the Quebecois voted on whether or not they would separate from Canada. The opening of the song expresses sentiments of hatred and resentment on the part of the French speaking population. The last two lines of the second verse describe French as the "half-dead tongue" and makes the statement, on behalf of the French population, that "Canada is not our country." These two pieces are crucial to understanding the separatists' cause, as language is the driving factor behind it. As Chafiik explained, if Quebec remains a part of Canada, the minority Francophones will inevitably be engulfed by the majority Anglophones, losing not only their language but the culture and way of life associated with it. The icing on the cake is the irony of the song defending French in Canada is actually composed in English:

Frenchmen came from France
To exterminate indians
Satisfy their appetite for genocide
They proliferated like vermin
So today we are millions
Dreaming of destruction
Waiting for secession
…
To ignore our half-dead tongue, you know we're wrong
Why don't you open your eyes And you will see that Canada is not our country

Serge also has a piece that spits at the feet of the Académie Française and their perfect French. *Le Joual* demonstrates the pride of the Quebecois for their language, with all of its imperfections and "rough" slang. Serge himself said that joual and Quebecois French are one and the same, in his mind. He's spoken to peers who associate joual with the working class, or for whom it is essentially a classification for Quebecois slang, and in this song, Serge captures both of those interpretations, describing joual as a "diamond in plywood," as "swearwords in mass with English words in just the right place."

Le joual, c't'un diamant en plywood
Gossé a'ec un couteau d'pêche
C't'un tabarnak de bon coup de coude
D'ins côtes d'la langue française
Le joual, c'est des sacres en masse
Avec des mots anglais juste à bonne place
Comme « Hey man, t'aurais-tu une smoke ? »
Mais pas trop quand même, on n'est pas des blokes

One song in particular that I asked Serge to discuss was one called "Charlie Hebdo". It is beautifully relevant to this work as a piece of Quebecois culture expressing a point of view on something in French culture using Quebecois French. Serge was surprised by my insight, because he did not write the song – or any songs, for that matter – with the angle of analysis of my research in mind. Rather, "Charlie Hebdo" was a current event that touched him deeply,

because the satirical, vulgar, and pointed work that the magazine does is very similar to the manner in which Serge himself expresses his views of the world in his music.

Je n'veux pas entendre
Le chœur des matantes
Chanter Je suis Mononc"
Et qu'les critiques qui
Me trouvaient pourris
Trouvent soudain des mérites
À mes textes scabreux
Mon humour graveleux
Et toutes mes tounes de bites

In this verse, he puts himself in the shoes of the people at Charlie Hebdo, asking not to hear cries of "I am Mononc'," like those who stood with the magazine after the attack declared "I am Charlie." He does not want his critics to suddenly see the worth of his work which they previously described as risqué and salacious, nor to change their opinion of him from "rotten" to anything more pleasant or praiseful. While this song might not directly relate to the expression of the Quebecois identity, it demonstrates Serge's global engagement and his use of his language to do so. It also connects, in a way other than some linguistic standard, these two very different cultures, strengthening the rapport between their respective variations of French and suggesting that, perhaps, there is more similarity in the respective identities than meets the eye – or ear, I should say.

## Conclusion

The conflict in the French language is not, it turns out, between the standard and linguistic variations. It is in the fight for recognition of the identities these linguistic variations represent and cultivating them to ensure that their culture and way of life continue to evolve and grow. The standard serves as an anchor for these variations, thus allowing them to adapt to the needs of the identities they communicate without losing sight of where they come from. It is not a competition of standard versus variation, but rather a mutual relationship: the standard acts as a sort of validation and common core of the variations that carry its name across the globe. This is done most effectively in the same way in which language first populated the earth: through oral communication, not writing.

The standard of France is established with pen and paper. Its variations are living, breathing entities that evolve as they are used and as they interact with their environment. In Occitania, that means the regional Occitan language is imbedded in French to such a degree that people are not even necessarily aware they are not speaking "proper" French. In Toulouse – or anywhere else in France, for that matter – it might mean that Arabic or Berber words find their way into everyday conversation, so that a person might speak upwards of three languages in any given phrase just to communicate that single thought. In Quebec, it means signing into law the role of French as the province's official language, while welcoming immigrants into the large metropolis and providing access to English classes throughout the province, including the secluded rural towns.

The inevitable interaction here with English among other languages creates a unique characteristic of Quebec French, in addition to posing a serious threat to the survival of not only the language but the Quebecois culture rooted in that language. Interaction is the key component;

it is through interaction that we learn from the cultures around us, that we defend our own culture and explore our identity as it relates to those around us. If languages did not interact, there would be no question of standard versus variation. A language in its own bubble would be perfectly regulated. However, as Tatou pointed out, a language is meant for something. It is not just a pretty thing to look at, it enables us to communicate, to express ourselves, to develop ideas and relationships and to grow. It is not logical to expect growth from a stagnant standard – the material through which we interact must be malleable, or there is no possibility of a dialogue.

My initial research intention was to analyze artists' lyrics in an effort to understand their position on the rapport between their identity and the language they use to express it and support my findings with whatever information I could glean from conversations with artists, should I be lucky enough to engage with them. Instead, I was fortunate enough to be received by five different artists with whom I could discuss, first hand, the effect that language has on their form of self-expression and the communal identity of those who share their version of French. This proved significantly more substantial than anything I could have garnered from the written words of their songs, further solidifying the argument that orality trumps writing when it comes to ensuring a language's well-being. What is more, it was not solely the orality and observation of the music or the artist that led to my findings, but the ability to interact with them. These conversations helped me navigate my own relationship with language and my identity because a dialogue is inherently a two-way street.

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